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ABSTRACT

Research conducted during the Youth Research and Technical Assistance project established that the process of designing effective job training/employment programs for at-risk youth can be framed in terms of the following broad themes: focusing on youth as youth by developing program designs that are appropriate for their age and level of development; connecting work and learning by providing opportunities for youth to develop basic and cognitive skills in a "real world" context; providing opportunities for longer-term sequences of services; and promoting quality in a decentralized system. Among the elements that must be included in a longer-term, comprehensive system of services for youth are the following: flexible entry/exit through a developmental sequence of programs and services; mechanisms to match youth to appropriate services and track their progress over time; community-wide interagency partnerships to provide long-term, comprehensive services; and a variety of program strategies. The following elements are key to promoting quality in a decentralized system: active investment in capacity building and professional development; an assessment system providing accurate information for matching youth to services, assessing gains, and tracking progress through a sequence of services; and a clearly defined, meaningful set of program outcomes that form the basis for an ongoing performance management system. (MN)

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Moving Towards Quality Programs
Defining Criteria for Quality Program Designs Based on Lessons from Research and Experience

By:
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Alan Melchior

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MOVING TOWARDS QUALITY PROGRAMS:
Defining Criteria for Quality Program Design Based on Lessons from Research and Experience

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During the past 10 years, the employment and training community has witnessed a steady evolution of youth employment and education policy at the national level. Prompted by an ongoing stream of research and national commission reports on the increasingly challenging labor market and the poor basic skills of American young people, there has been a significant shift in national policy towards strategies that promote the establishment of ambitious national standards, the targeting of services to those with the poorest skills, and the development of more comprehensive service strategies, particularly those that provide a stronger link between work and education. These changes are evident in a number of key pieces of legislation, including the 1992 JTPA Amendments, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, and the National and Community Services Trust Act. They also inform changes in JTPA's performance standards system as well as the development of a number of major national youth initiatives such as Youth Fair Chance, Youthbuild, and Americorps.

At the core of this change in national policy is the recognition that there needs to be a fundamental shift in the way we prepare young people, particularly economically disadvantaged youth, for productive citizenship and employment. Implicit in that policy change is a shift from an overwhelming emphasis on *employment* as the primary goal of youth-oriented programs to an emphasis on *employability development* and a corresponding shift towards longer-term, more comprehensive strategies and towards the targeting of services to those most in need of assistance.

While there has been substantial progress on the legislative and policy front, most practitioners and policy makers would agree that the translation of policy into working, high quality programs in the field remains a major challenge. Under JTPA, the investment in staff development has been minimal, and much of that has focused on compliance rather than program redesign or improved services.[1] Guidance for local policy makers and program managers has also been limited. Changes in performance standards have provided general goals, but offer little in the way of clear standards of quality for program design and development.

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[1] Berkeley Planning Associates and Macro Systems, Inc., *JTPA Staffing and Staff Training at the State and SDA Levels, Final Report* (August 30, 1990).

If change is to come in the ways that services are designed and delivered to youth, national leadership at the Departments of Labor, Education, and others, and local practitioners and policy makers need to work together to define the elements of program quality and to make the investments in staff development needed to put those criteria or standards into operation.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a starting point for this challenging task by suggesting a set of criteria, based on our reading of the research literature and our experience in the field, that we believe represent key indicators of effective employment and training programs for youth. It is important to note that our emphasis here is not on defining a new set of outcome measures, though there is clearly a need to continue to refine the performance standards we apply to youth employment and training programs. Instead, our focus is on the questions: "What are the elements of an effective program for at-risk youth?" "What do we know about 'what works' for at-risk youth, and how can we begin to translate that knowledge into standards for high quality youth programs?"

In the discussion that follows, we argue that the answers to these questions can be framed in terms of four broad themes:

1. the need to ***focus on youth as youth***, and to address the developmental needs of youth within our program strategies;

2. ***connecting work and learning***, by creating learning-rich work experiences and transforming the way in which learning takes place in classrooms;

3. ***providing opportunities for longer-term sequences of services*** that recognize employability development as a long-term investment for some youth, and that provide the support that many at-risk youth need to develop the higher level skills needed for long-term employment;

4. ***promoting quality in a decentralized system***, through significant investments in staff development and in gathering the data (through assessment and evaluation) needed for effective management and improvement.

The discussion that follows draws on a number of sources. A major source is the research conducted by the Center for Human Resources at Brandeis University and Public/Private Ventures as part of the Youth Research and Technical Assistance (YRTA) Project, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. The Youth Research and Technical Assistance Project was a multi-year effort to review, distill, and disseminate findings from the past decade of research on youth and employment-related programs and services, as well as research in education, economics, psychology, sociology, and

political science.[2]. The four themes used to organize this paper were first articulated in the course of the YRTA Project and draw heavily on the project research. One of the lessons that we confirmed in that research was that there is a substantial body of research and knowledge about effective practices in other fields -- in the literature on adolescent psychology, evaluation research on alternative schools, cognitive development research, and the like -- that can directly inform the design of employment and training programs for youth and substantially expand our knowledge base beyond the confines of our own, limited, evaluation research.

At the same time, we also draw heavily on the practical program experience gained in the course of Brandeis' own work in the field and its synthesis of the experiences of practitioners working around the country. This "field-based research" often complements the more formal research by reinforcing the formal research findings and by helping to identify the practical implications for program design and implementation.[3]

Finally, our goal in this paper is to present the basis for a much more extended discussion. While we believe that research and experience do point towards criteria for effective practices, we make no claim that the criteria presented here represent the *only* way of defining those standards or a complete list. Rather, they are conceived as a

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[2] One of the major products of the YRTA Project was a collection of research synthesis papers aimed at addressing three broad questions: What programs, services, and techniques best prepare youth for jobs and careers? What strategies of governance and management offer the related opportunity for effective delivery of those services? What factors regarding youth, their environment, and the labor market must be addressed in providing those services? The project's two-volume collection of papers included 10 papers: "The Effectiveness of Federally-Funded Employment and Training Strategies for Youth;" "Supportive Services for Youth;" "Structure and Sequence: Motivational Aspects of Programmatic Structure in Employment and Training Interventions for Disadvantaged Youth"; "Critical Skills for Labor Market Success;" "School-to-Work Transition: Failings, Dilemmas, and Policy Options;" "Coordination, Collaboration, and Linkages;" "Performance Standards and Performance Management;" "The Mission and Structure of National Human Resource Policy for Disadvantaged Youth;" and "Youth in the Nineties: Trends and Expected Patterns;" "Youth and the Labor Market in the Nineties." See U.S. Department of Labor, *Dilemmas in Youth Employment Programming: Findings from the Youth Research and Technical Assistance Project* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 1992)

[3] Brandeis' recent *Summer Beginnings* project, a 12 site network of summer work and learning programs has provided a particularly rich set of insights as communities have worked to transform the concepts of hands-on learning and work-based learning into practical, working youth programs. As part of the YRTA Project, the Center for Human Resources has also developed a series of practitioner-oriented guides and training packages: on program design options for in-school and out-of-school youth; employability assessment; case management; and summer work-based learning. Those materials were based on the formal YRTA Project research plus case studies, interviews with practitioners and other field-based research efforts.

starting point and a framework that can inform and advance the discussion to come.[4]

The Context: Youth Need Clear Standards and Local Variations

The starting point for any discussion of the effectiveness of programs for youth is the recognition that there is no single program model that works for all youth. The young people we serve differ widely in terms of their age, skills levels, knowledge and experience, and life circumstances. While one young person may benefit from (and be ready for) a highly structured occupational training program, another may need a more basic introduction to work and workplace skills.

When we talk about the criteria for effective programs, then, we need to do so in a context that recognizes the need for flexibility in the application of those criteria to individual programs. We *know*, based on research on adolescent development, education, etc., that younger adolescents are different from older youth (and different from adults) and generally respond to different types of instructional strategies.[5] We *know* that skill levels, in terms of basic academic and work-related skills, vary substantially among young people, ranging from youth who can read and write at only the most basic levels and who have never worked to those who are essentially ready to move into a demanding training or employment environment.[6] We *know* that young mothers require a mix of services, including child care, medical services, flexible scheduling and the like, that may be different from other young adults and that their program participation depends, in large part, on the degree to which those service are

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[4] It is important to note that the question of how any set of criteria or standards is to be applied (nationally or locally, voluntary standards or program certification, etc.) is a wholly separate question, not addressed in this paper, and one on which there is bound to be much debate.

[5] See for example, Carnegie Commission, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, (Carnegie Commission Report, Volume 21, Number 13, June, 1989); Peter Scales, *A Portrait of Young Adolescents in the 1990s* (Chapel Hill: Center for Early Adolescence, 1991); and Center for Human Resources, *Future Options Education* (Waltham, MA: Center for Human Resources, 1990) for discussions of services for younger adolescents. Much of the middle school movement in education, for example, grows out of the recognition of the distinctive needs of early adolescents. In much the same vein, research such as Paul Osterman's study of youth in the labor market (*Getting Started: The Youth Labor Market* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980)) suggest that older adolescents also operate in ways that are distinct from that of adults, moving from job to job, testing out careers, etc.

[6] See the various studies by the Educational Testing Service, such as Irwin Kirsch and Ann Jungblatt, Literacy: Profiles of America's Young Adults (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 1986) and Kirsch, Jungblatt, and Campbell, *Beyond the School Doors: The Literacy Needs of Job Seekers Served by the U.S. Department of Labor* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1992). The need to match services by skill levels has been made in a number of Brandeis publications. See, for example, *Working It Out: An Anthology of State and Local Performance Management Strategies* (Waltham, MA: Center for Human Resources, 1989) and *Practitioner's Guide to Program Options for Out-of-School Youth* (1992).

offered.[7] We also know that programs need to build on local resources and circumstances. The history of replication efforts in employment and training and elsewhere highlights the dual need for clear standards and local variations.

The first point, then, is that effective program design begins with an awareness and understanding of the needs and characteristics of young people and the need to target program design (that is, to apply the elements of effective practice) in ways that address the needs of the particular population being served.[8]

The second, related point is that program design also needs to recognize the skill demands of employers and the labor market. The goal of every effective employment and training programs for youth is to prepare young people for long-term employability. To meet that goal, practitioners and policy makers need a clear understanding of the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that are required for success in the labor market and integrate those skills as the goals of their programs. It is within these two parameters: the needs and characteristics of program participants and the needs and requirements of employers that program design takes place, and it is within that context that we can begin to define a more general set of criteria for quality programs.

A Framework for Program Quality

The Youth Research and Technical Assistance Project defined a set of four broad research and policy themes as ways of organizing the major lessons from program experience and research and defining the critical building blocks for effective youth programs. While by no means the only framework, they represent an effort to present a growing body of research in a clear and understandable way.

Youth Development

The first of these themes, and one of the strongest messages to emerge from the YRTA Project, is the need to integrate the ideas of youth and adolescent development into youth program design and to provide developmentally appropriate experiences

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[7] See, for example, Denis Polit, Jane Quint, and James Riccio, *The Challenge of Serving Teenage Mothers: Lessons from Project Redirection* (NY: Manpower Development Research Corporation, 1988) and Jane Quint, Barbara Fink, Sharon Rowser, *New Chance: Implementing a Comprehensive Program for Disadvantaged Young Mothers and Their Children* (NY: MDRC, 1991)

[8] One of the reasons (though not the only one) that so many employment and training programs produce poor results is that historically young people have been placed in available slots rather than in services matched to their needs. In that regard, it is important to note that most of the young people in the JTPA evaluation were enrolled in adult-oriented programs rather than in programs designed specifically to address the needs of at-risk youth.

(including work experience) for young people as part of every employment and training initiative. Most employment and training programs today have been designed for adults and older youth, with relatively little attention paid to the developmental needs of younger adolescents. But the research on adolescent development is clear that young people bring a different set of characteristics and developmental tasks to education and training than do adults. In the words of one of the YRTA reports, "youth coming to second-chance programs are undergoing the psychological, emotional, and social development that is an inherent part of the passage through adolescence." They are trying to establish an independent identity, learning to think in new ways, testing out new roles and relationships, learning about different behaviors and strategies. For young people to make the successful transition to adulthood and employability, they need an opportunity to practice those new skills and to master these developmental tasks.[9]

There are three related sets of implications and basic criteria that flow from this theme:

1. ***Program designs need to be age and stage appropriate***. In broad terms, programs for younger participants need to be more exploratory in nature, have more variety in their activities, and include more group than individual work. Materials and activities for younger participants (particularly middle school programs) should not simply be "dumbed-down" versions of those used with older youth or adults.[10]

2. All youth employment programs need to be ***developmentally-oriented and include a range of opportunities for young people to engage in developmentally appropriate activities***. Perhaps the most critical of these is an opportunity to participate in a task-based relationship with an adult. It is through the development of ongoing relationships adults -- workplace supervisors, mentors, case managers, or others -- that young people have a chance to test out new roles, practice relating to adults in work-related settings, learn about adult responsibilities and expectations, and test out their skills. But other elements of program design are developmentally important as well. Young people also need opportunities to develop positive peer relationships, to demonstrate competency (and hence build self-esteem, and to gain experience in dealing with a variety of work and social situations. Finally, young people also need an opportunity to review and

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[9] See Thomas J. Smith and Michelle Alberti Gambone, "Effectiveness of Federally Funded Employment Training Strategies for Youth," in *Dilemmas in Youth Employment Programming: Findings from the Youth Research and Technical Assistance Project* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1992). Also see Michelle Gambone, *Strengthening Programs for Youth: Promoting Adolescent Development in the JTPA System* (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1993) a further study of the integration of adolescent development tasks in youth employment and training programs conducted for the YRTA project.

[10] See Center for Human Resources, *Future Options Education* for a discussion of age appropriate career-related activities for middle-school-aged youth.

reflect on what they are experiencing and learning so that the lessons of their own experience have a chance to be integrated into daily thinking and behavior.[11]

Not surprisingly, well-structured work experiences offer many of these opportunities: task-based relationships with adults, peer relationships, opportunities to learn and exercise skills and achievement and to function in a variety of settings and situations. This is a critical point, because *in this context, work experience becomes a tool for youth and employability development and an integral part of the adolescent development process rather than a final outcome*. One implication of this is the need to build work experience back into youth program design as an integral element. A second is a new emphasis on the *quality* of work experience (in terms of the quality of the supervision and the skills required) as a key program effectiveness criteria.[12]

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
Serving Youth as Youth

☐ *Age and Stage Appropriate Program Designs*

☐ *Program Designs that are Developmentally Oriented and Include Opportunities to Engage in Developmentally Appropriate Activities*
- Task-based Adult/Youth Relationships
- Peer Interaction
- Opportunities to Demonstrate Competency
- Reflection
- Quality Work Experience
- A Variety of Experiences (Recreation, Service, Education, Work, etc.)

☐ *An Assessment Process that Can Identify the Needs and Developmental Stages of Young Participants and Link Them to Appropriate Services*

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[11] The role of reflection as part of the developmental and educational process has been particularly highlighted in the literature on community service learning. See for example, the various essays on community service in Jane C. Kendall and Associates, *Combining Service and Learning; A Resource Book for Community and Public Service* (Raleigh, NC: National Society for Internships and Experiential Education, 1990).

[12] It is worth noting that the research on the impact of work experience on school-aged youth is increasingly pointing to the quality of the worksite, in terms of the quality of the supervision and the skills required by the job, as the critical factor in determining negative or positive impact. See, for example, David Stern, "Quality of Students' Work Experience and Orientation Toward Work," *Youth and Society*, 22 (2): 263-282. These and related studies are summarized in the YRTA Project paper by Smith and Gambone, "The Effectiveness of Federally Funded Employment Training Strategies for Youth."

It is also important to recognize, however, that other experiences can supplement work in providing developmental opportunities. Much of the emphasis of the youth development movement is on the importance of providing positive, structured experiences for young people, including community service and recreation. Again, the point here is to create opportunities for young people to develop the broader social, emotional, and cognitive experiences that they need and will draw on in the workplace.[13]

3. A youth-centered approach also requires ***an assessment process that can identify the needs and developmental stages of young participants and link them to appropriate services***. As will become evident later in this paper, a high quality assessment system is one of the program effectiveness criteria that relates to all aspects of program design and management.

Connecting Work and Learning

The second major theme is the importance of strengthening the link between work and learning and of providing opportunities to develop basic and cognitive skills in a "real world" context. This theme lies at the heart of much of the transformation of employment and training policy during the last decade, dating back to the 1986 JTPA Amendments which required, for the first time, the integration of basic skills instruction in the Summer Youth Employment and Training Program. The benefits of combining basic skills education and occupational training has also been one of the long-term lessons from the Job Corps and the YEDPA demonstrations and directly informed projects such as the Jobstart demonstration.[14]

More recently, educational research on cognitive development and the myriad reports on the growing demand for applied basic and higher order thinking skills in the

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[13] The Youth Fair Chance model recognizes this particular point in its emphasis on the development of recreational programs as well as the core school-to-work and community-based training programs.

[14] The initial goal of adding academic enrichment to the summer jobs program was to reduce summer learning loss. One of the major positive findings of the STEP program was that summer learning loss *did* take place in the absence of any intervention and that programs like STEP, which combined a half-day of education with a half-day of work, could effectively reduce learning loss among disadvantaged teens. See Jean Baldwin Grossman and Cynthia Sipe, *Summer Training and Education Program: Report on Long-Term Impacts*, (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1992) and Gary Walker and Frances Vilella-Velez, *Anatomy of a Demonstration: The Summer Training and Education Program (STEP) from Pilot Through Replication and Post-program Impacts* (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1992) For the Job Corps and YEDPA findings, see Andrew Hahn and Robert Lerman, *What Works in Youth Employment Policy?* (Washington, D.C.: National Planning Association, 1985). Also see Patricia Auspos, *Launching JOBSTART: A Demonstration for Dropouts in the JTPA System* (NY: MDRC, 1987).

"high performance workplace" have led to a new sophistication and understanding of the work and learning connection. Whereas the lesson from YEDPA and the Job Corps was "combine work and learning," the lessons from SCANS, America's Choice, and similar studies is "integrate work and learning by teaching basic skills in work-related settings." In effect we have learned that simply combining basic skills education and work in the same program is not enough. *If young people are to learn to use their skills in the workplace of the future, they need to learn and practice those skills in a work-related setting.*[15]

There are a number of implications of an integrated work and learning strategy for program design and management:

1. ***Both worksites and classrooms need to provide opportunities for active, hands-on learning using work-related materials and situations.*** In the *Summer Beginnings* program, practitioners spoke of the need to create "learning-rich work" by making the worksite a learning laboratory through the use of work-based curriculum and instruction. In the same vein, project participants also spoke of "transforming classrooms" by organizing the classroom into high performance, task-based work organizations and by using real work situations and projects as the basis for in-school learning.

Integral to this transformation are a number of fundamental changes in the way in which learning, teaching, and supervision are organized. At the core of the transformed classroom and worksite is the idea of active learning, where youth are actively engaged in individual and team-oriented projects where *they* research, plan, implement, and evaluate the work. In that context, teachers become guide, coaches and facilitators rather than lecturers, and need to bring an understanding of workplace skills and how to create situations where young people can learn and use those skills. Worksite supervisors also take on a somewhat different role, with a commitment to learning and an understanding of how to create learning opportunities on the job. Finally, worksite supervisors and teachers need to be able to work together so that classroom-based and worksite-based learning reinforce each other.

2. Programs also need to develop ***a broad set of workplace-related basic skills that meet the needs and expectations of employers.*** One of the major elements of the work and learning connection is the need to interpret "basic skills" in the broadest possible context (the SCANS term is "workplace know-how") and to teach not only the foundation skills

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[15] See U.S. Department of Labor, Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, *What Work Requires of Schools. A SCANS Report for America 2000* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1991) and Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* (Rochester, NY: National Center on Education and the Economy, 1990). One of the more influential of the educational researchers on this issue is Lauren Resnick. See her paper, "Learning In School and Out," *Educational Researcher* 16: 13-20 (1987) for her argument on the need to teach in "real world" settings.

(reading, writing, calculation), but the social and interpersonal skills needed to function in a flexible, interactive workplace. To accomplish that goal, once again, programs need to provide opportunities for participants to practice a wide variety of skills -- teamwork, communication, problem-solving, etc. -- in a practical setting. Here, too, one might note, a well-structured and supervised workplace provides at least one setting in which skills can be learned and practiced in context.

3. ***Ongoing assessment needs to be an integral part of program design, and the assessment approach needs to match the skills being measured.*** Few of the skills and competencies included in "workplace know-how" can be measured through traditional paper and pencil, multiple choice tests. In order to assess workplace-related skills effectively, programs need to adopt a mix of performance-based assessment strategies.

CONNECTING WORK AND LEARNING
Structuring Active Learning Environments
for Education and Employability Development

☐ *Opportunities for Active, Hands-On Learning Using Work-Related Materials and Situations* (Transforming Classrooms and Creating Learning Rich Worksites)
- Youth Actively Engaged in Researching, Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Individual and/or Team-oriented Projects
- Teachers as Guides, Coaches and Facilitators
- Teachers Understand Workplace Know-How/Basic Skills and Can Create Curriculum Where Young People Can Learn/Use Those Skills
- Worksites Committed to a Balance of Work and Learning
- Worksite Supervisors Understand Workplace Know-How and Have Ability to Create "Learning Rich" Work for Youth

☐ *A Broad Set of Workplace-Related Basic Skills that Meet the Needs of Employers*
- A Combination of Basic "Foundation" Skills and Workplace Competencies (SCANS Skills as an Initial Framework)
- Employer and Community Involvement in Defining Skills

☐ *Ongoing, Performance-based Assessment*

☐ *A Clear Connection from the Educational Process to the Labor Market*
- A Career Plan and Path to Employment or Further Education and Appropriate Connecting Activities

4. Finally, the research and practice associated with school-to-work transition also makes clear that programs need ***a clear connection from the educational process into the broader labor market -- a career plan and path to education or employment*** that reduce the "milling around" that is common to young people in the labor market and that helps young people ensure that they are gaining the skills they need. In the language of the new School-to-Work Opportunities Act, these "connecting services," which include career counseling, job search assistance, and the like represent the link between an integrated work and learning strategy and its ultimate outcome of a job.

Extending Services Over Time

The third basic theme is the need to develop a *sequence* of services that extends over time as well as a comprehensive *mix* of services. Experience, common sense, and research point in the same direction: the more at risk the population, the more extensive services must be to achieve substantial employment and income impacts. In the same vein, to the extent that we view employability development as a *developmental process* rather than a one-time *intervention*, we need to provide the capacity for young people to move through a series of programs and learning experiences over an often extended period of time.

Accomplishing these goals, however, requires a serious rethinking about both program design and our expectations about how young people gain the skills and experience needed to be employable. In many ways, our existing employment and training system is constructed on the assumption that young people (and adults) enter a program and stay there until they are job-ready. Within that paradigm, employability development is viewed as a one-time intervention, and longer-term services simply means staying within a single program for a longer period of time.

But research and our own experiences in the labor market point to the fact that for many youth, education and the acquisition of career-related skills and experience takes place in stages, and often in fits and starts. Research on both high school dropouts and college students tells us that many young people drop out and back into the educational process over a period of time. Reports from the Jobstart demonstration, New Chance, and other programs for youth also tell us that young people are regularly forced by external factors to interrupt their education and training -- to care for children, earn a living, or deal with a family crisis -- even when a full set of "comprehensive" supports are available. Research on the entry of young people into the labor market also argues that initially youth often move from job to job (and possibly program to

program) until they find a "match" that fits their needs and lets them move forward.[16]

The point here is a simple one: as we think about longer-term, comprehensive services for young people, we need to recognize that long-term employability development is often made up of a series of short-term commitments. At the program and "system" level, we need to design strategies that allow for this "in and out" process and that provide opportunities to sequence education and training in a flexible manner over a period of time. Some of the implications for program design include:

1. Individual programs and community-level "systems" need to provide for ***flexible entry and exit through a developmental sequence of programs and services***. The idea of open entry/open exit within programs is a familiar one, and has long provided a means for youth and adults to match program participation with the other demands on their time. What is needed in addition is a mechanism for open entry and exit within a *system* of programs, so that young people can complete a set of services, leave to work, and return to upgrade to the next skill level over a period of time, without having to terminate and re-enroll or lose his or her eligibility for services. An essential part of the process is the provision of post-program follow-up services that provide an ongoing point of contact for participants as they move back and forth between programs or between training and work.[17]

2. Programs and communities also need ***the capacity to match youth to appropriate services and to track progress over time***. The basic element here is a community-wide assessment and case management system that has the capacity to identify interests and needs on an ongoing basis, develop clearly defined goals and plans, help young people move between programs, provide longer-term follow-up services (see above) and track progress over time. To accomplish this, youth-serving programs and institutions need to establish mechanisms for sharing assessment data, common protocols for accessing

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[16] The 1991 Department of Education report on *Dropout Rates in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center on Education Statistics, NCES 92-129, 1992) notes that nearly all the dropouts in a 1988 survey reported that they planned to complete their high school education in the future. An earlier report (*Dropout Rates in the United States, 1988*) notes that approximately 46% of the dropouts in a 1980 cohort of students had earned a diploma or acquired a GED by 1986, and an additional 12% were in the process at that time. For college retention, see Vincent Tinto, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Tinto notes, for example, that only 40% of those completing college do so in 4 years, and that approximately 40% of those who leave college are "stopouts" who later return, sometimes after significant periods of time.

[17] A recently completed study by Andrew Hahn at Brandeis of the Quantum Opportunities Program (QOP), funded by the Ford Foundation, confirms the importance of this ongoing contact over an extended period. That program provided a mix of basic skills, career planning, support and case management services over a four year period to high risk youth in four sites. Even in those sites where services were relatively limited by the fourth year, the extended contact proved to have an impact on participants.

services, and a shared referral process.[18]

3. Programs and communities need to establish ***community-wide interagency partnerships to provide for both long-term and comprehensive services***. Long-term and comprehensive services require a community-wide strategy to ensure the availability of services, to provide for easy transition from program to program (or from summer to school year, for example), and to provide a broad mix of funding to support a flexible mix of services.[19]

4. Finally, the ideal system will also provide ***a variety of program strategies for***

EXTENDING SERVICES OVER TIME
Providing a Sequence as well as a Mix of Services

☐ *Flexible Entry and Exit Through a Developmental Sequence of Programs and Services*
- Open Entry/Exit within Programs
- Open Entry/Exit within a System of Programs that Allows Participants to Move Through a Succession of Activities/Experiences
- Provision an Ongoing Point of Contact and Long-Term Post-Program Services

☐ *The Capacity to Match Youth to Appropriate Services and Track Progress Over Time*
- Community-Wide Assessment and Case Management System including Mechanisms for Sharing Assessment Data, Common Protocols for Accessing Services, and a Shared Referral Process

☐ *Community-Wide Interagency Partnerships to Provide for Long-Term and Comprehensive Services*

☐ *A Variety of Program Strategies/Options for Participants*

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[18] The Youth Fair Chance initiative represents a move in this direction. The Department has called for YFC communities to establish a "community management system" in recognition of the need for a systems approach to delivering a range of services.

[19] The Youth Fair Chance design also begins to address this issue through the requirement of a Community Resource/Advisory Board and planning for *comprehensive* services for all youth in a saturation strategy.

participants to choose from. One of the clear lessons from experience is that no single program strategy works for all youth. Not only do programs need to address different age and skill levels among participants, but ideally participants should have an opportunity to select a program that matches their learning style. We know, for example, that 25% of the participants in conservation and service corps programs drop out within the first month, presumably because they realize that the corps approach does not work for them.[20] A "youth-centered" or "customer-driven" approach suggests that the more options a community can offer young people for acquiring employability skills, the more likely a young person will find a good "match" and gain the skills needed for employment.

Promoting Quality in a Decentralized System

As a largely decentralized system both locally (through networks of service providers) and nationally, the employment and training system faces a constant challenge in promoting the quality and effectiveness of its programs. As the emphasis on providing services to more "at-risk" youth grows, and as the employment and training system moves towards the provision of more complex, comprehensive, and longer-term services, the issues of program quality and effectiveness are becoming more critical. One of the implications of these developments (and one of the major lessons of initiatives such as *Summer Beginnings*) is the need for significant and strategic investment in capacity building among employment and training professionals. We need to recognize that in the same way that American competitiveness depends on the development of a highly skilled workforce, the quality of employment and training services also ultimately depends on building the skills of the professionals responsible for implementing them.

While capacity building is key, the implementation of effective strategies for defining and measuring program quality is also vital. For the employment and training system, this means an investment in ongoing assessment and evaluation and a system for performance management based on clearly defined goals and outcomes. In that context, three key elements stand out in promoting quality and effectiveness at the local level include:

1. ***Active investment in capacity building and professional development***. Professional development needs to move beyond occasional conference attendance and training on compliance issues. Effective capacity building needs to take place on a regular basis and to address such service-related issues as adolescent development, workplace skills and the changing labor market, curriculum and instruction for work-based learning, and performance-based assessment to ensure that all staff have the skills and knowledge

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[20] See Alvia Branch, Sally Liederman, and Thomas J. Smith, *Youth Conservation and Service Corps: Findings from a National Evaluation* (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1987).

needed to put effective programs into operation.[21]

2. ***An assessment system that can provide accurate information for matching youth to services, assessing gains, and tracking progress through a sequence of services.*** As suggested in earlier sections, an effective assessment system is individualized and ongoing, performance-based, and functionally-oriented. Assessment information on the skills of participants, skill gains, the degree to which program services match the needs of participants, and relative program performance provides a powerful tool for program management and continuous improvement.

PROMOTING QUALITY IN A DECENTRALIZED SYSTEM

Assuring Quality Outcomes for Youth, Employers, and the Community

☐ *Active Investment in Capacity Building and Staff Development*
- Ongoing Staff Development
- Program Design/Service Oriented

☐ *An Assessment System that Provides Accurate Information for Matching Youth to Services, Assessing Gains, and Tracking Progress through a Sequence of Services*
- Individualized and Ongoing
- Performance-based
- Used as Tool for Program Management

☐ *A Performance Management System Based on Clearly Defined Program Outcomes*
- Clearly Defined, Meaningful Goals and Participant Outcomes, Developed with Employers and the Community
- Strategies for Evaluating Program Performance and Customer Satisfaction (Assessment and Evaluation)
- Clear Accountability
- A Process for Reporting Results to the Broader Community

[21] The "subject specific" training sponsored by the Department of Labor represents an important start. However, this training needs to be expanded, better targeted, and replicated on the state and local level to have an impact on overall program quality.

3. ***A clearly defined, meaningful set of program outcomes that form the basis for an ongoing performance management system.*** An effective performance management system might include a clearly defined set of goals and participant outcomes, developed with employers and the community (perhaps beginning with the SCANS skills as a framework); strategies for evaluating both program performance (through assessment) and "customer" satisfaction; a means for establishing accountability for performance, and a process for reporting results to the broader community.[22]

Summary

The elements outlined here are by no means comprehensive. But they represent a broad framework that, we believe, can stand as a starting point for a more substantial discussion of program quality and effectiveness. As national policy continues to move towards a more youth and development-focused vision of employability development, we need to find new ways of translating that vision into the day-to-day operations of local programs and practitioners. Clearly one step in that process is the translation of research and experience into principles and criteria that can be used by local policy makers and professionals to guide program design and to establish standards that promote high quality services for young people.

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[22] The process recently used by the city of Little Rock, with assistance from the Center for Human Resources, stands as a useful model for this process. As part of developing a community-wide employability strategy, Little Rock New Futures and the Little Rock Youth Employment Policy Committee (a group which includes the PIC, schools, employers and others) engaged employers, educators, youth, community-based organizations, and others in focus groups to define and build consensus on a set of appropriate employability outcomes. The community is now in the process of orienting teachers, worksite supervisors, counselors, and funders to broaden the consensus and to implement the outcomes as part of program planning and management.